PAMPHLET

Theology & Racism

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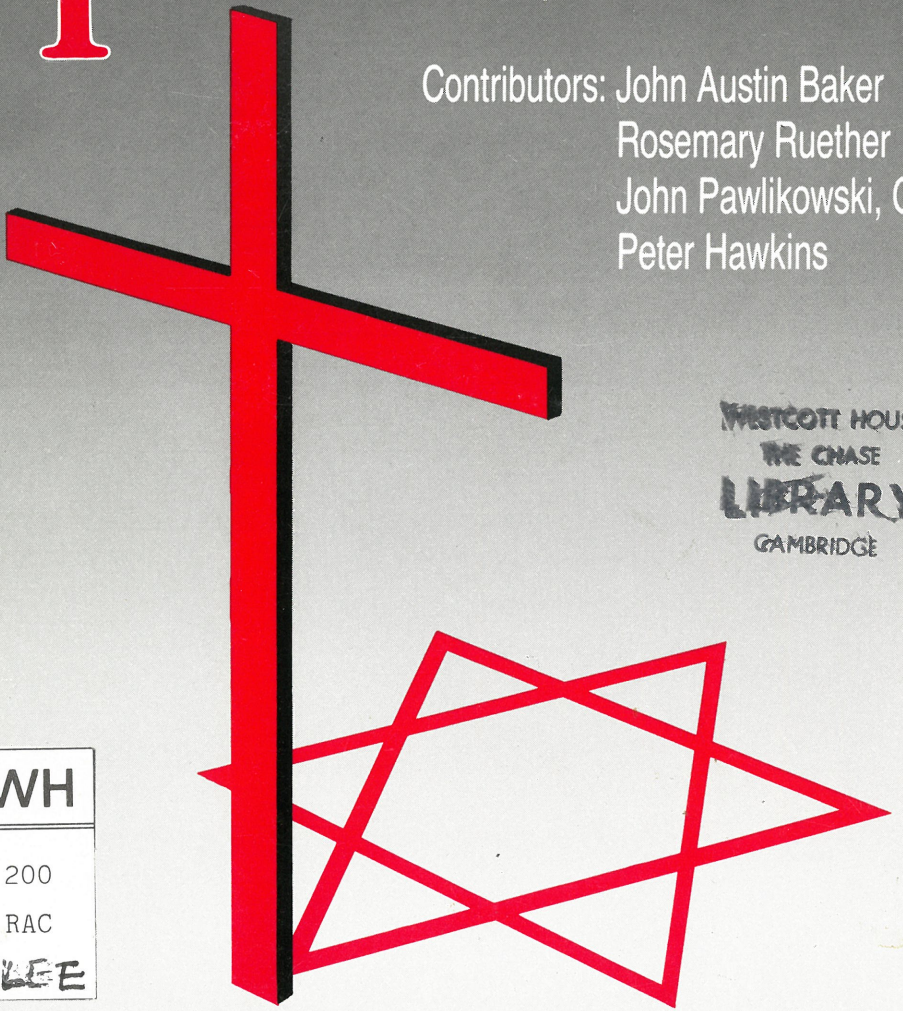

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THEOLOGY AND RACISM 1

The Bible, Racism and Anti-Semitism

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'. . . *for they know not what they do.*'

The above cartoon, by Vicky, appeared in the *New Statesman,* after the Sharpeville massacre (25th March 1960). We reproduce it, by permission, as the twenty-fifth anniversary of Sharpeville approaches.

THEOLOGY AND RACISM 1

THE BIBLE, RACISM AND ANTI-SEMITISM

JOHN AUSTIN BAKER
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JOHN PAWLIKOWSKI, OSM
PETER HAWKINS

Edited by Kenneth Leech

Race, Pluralism and Community Group,
Board for Social Responsibility, 1985

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INTRODUCTION

The Race, Pluralism and Community Group within the Board for Social Responsibility is concerned with the struggle against racism at all levels. It is clear to us that this struggle must involve a painful examination by Christians of the ways in which Christian theology itself has contributed to the rise of racism. So we are launching a series of occasional papers called *Theology and Racism* which will examine some of the theological aspects of racism and anti-racism. This first issue considers the use and misuse of the Bible. John Austin Baker, Bishop of Salisbury, considers the Bible in relation to racism. Rosemary Ruether looks at the theological roots of anti-Semitism, while John Pawlikowski extends this discussion, looking specifically at the New Testament. Peter Hawkins adds some comments on the issues raised.

We hope that this collection, and those which will follow, will help Christians and others to dig deeper into the roots of racism, and to discover the resources within the Christian tradition for a soundly based opposition to racism in all its forms.

KENNETH LEECH
Race Relations Field Officer.

RACISM AND THE BIBLE

JOHN AUSTIN BAKER

If we turn to the Bible for guidance and wisdom in our problems about race, our first impression may well be that the Bible has nothing whatever to say to us. For the writers of Scripture, as for thousands of vivid characters who pass through their pages, 'race' in the popular sense of that word today seems to be a non-concept. In this they were arguably typical of the ancient world. That world had many vicious obsessions, but was this one of them?

A Greek might despise non-Greeks, and refer to them as 'barbarians', but not on the basis of racial difference. The gulf and the antagonism were cultural. The Roman empire was a genuinely multiracial society. The paramount distinction was that between slave and free, or between citizen and non-citizen. In the Ancient Near East there were many inveterate and traditional hatreds; but they were not rooted in race. Even the notorious disdain of the ancient Egyptians for all other peoples was a cultural one, inspired by a sense of immense, unbroken history in a land preserved for many centuries inviolate against invasion, and by a conviction of cultural superiority.

The characteristic phrases, in Greek, *to genos tōn anthrōpōn,* or in Latin, *humanum genus,* sum up the reality: 'race' means those descended from one common stock, and the only large-scale application of the term is to humankind as a whole. Within that whole the sub-units to which the same words, *genos* or *genus* may be applied are those known or supposed to be descended from a common ancestor – tribes, clans, families. And, of course, the human race was only the largest possible instance of this principle, for it was the universal assumption of the ancient world that all men and women were ultimately descended from a single primal pair; and this very conviction speaks volumes for their underlying attitude to human differences. In the age of Middle Platonism in which Christianity came to birth, another popular idea was that the human family was also descended from the gods, or from God. The familiar words in St Paul's speech on the Areopagus in Athens. 'For we are also his offspring', *tou gar kai genos esmen,* 'we are his family', quoted perhaps from Aratus, perhaps from Cleanthes, fairly represent the view of many cultured people at that time. Their relevance for us is

that, even when ascribing to the human family the highest possible dignity, the thinkers of that age made no distinction between one type of human being and another.

In Hebrew too there is no word for what our culture has come to mean by 'race'. Israel shared the belief that all men and women were descended from one set of parents. 'Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living'. St Paul's Athens speech is again wholly characteristic: 'God made out of one every nation of humankind to dwell all over the earth' (Acts 17.26). This outlook has remained in Judaism to this day. Despite having been for centuries the victims of persecution which, if not racist in origin, certainly became more and more racist as time went by, the Jews have themselves been remarkably resistant to racist ideas. The gulf between a Jew and a non-Jew is essentially one of faith, culture, tradition, specifically of the Law, the Torah. Any man or woman of any people or nation may become a Jew, if he or she will accept the yoke of the Torah.

When people want to make fun of the Bible in general, and of the Old Testament in particular, they always refer to the same thing: 'all those "begats"' 'Mahalalel lived sixty-five years and begat Jared . . . and Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years and begat Enoch' and so forth. In fact these opening passages are of enormous importance. First of all, in the opening chapters of Genesis, they mark off Judaism from the other religions of the Ancient Near East in a decisive and significant way, because they make it impossible to take the Creation story as a self-contained myth, a symbolic tale representing the recurring cycles of existence. By the use of the most basic form of archival material, the genealogical tree, they link the Creation firmly into linear history as the opening scene of a drama with a beginning, a middle and an end. Adam was unique, his situation was unique, and that is why his story has consequences that control everything that comes after. And secondly, the genealogical lists spell out unmistakably the fact that all nations are in fact the descendants of those two human beings, the first man and the first woman; they show you step by step, how it came about, how the human race spread and developed. After the Flood, in Genesis 10, we have the 'Table of the Nations', accounting for all the then known world through Shem, Ham and Japheth. Neither the initial Creation, nor the re-creation after the divine judgment at the Deluge, are myths which could conceivably be applied to the separate histories of

separate groups. So far as humankind is concerned, there is only one group; and it is with this group that the universal, Noachic covenant is made (Genesis 9), on the basis of a single divine law about the sanctity of human life, so that, whatever privileges the Chosen People may later receive, the fundamental fact is that God is in an eternal covenant relationship with all human beings on the fourfold basis of creation, moral law, judgment in history, and grace.

This remains the underlying truth of human existence for the Old Testament even in the most defensive, introverted periods of Israel's history. I remember an African student telling, with shock and desperate hurt, how he had tapped a white girl on the shoulder in an 'Excuse me' dance, and she had turned round and spat at him. 'There I was, man', he said, 'standing in the middle of the floor, and her spit was running down my glasses.' Then he went on: 'They're so ignorant. Don't they know that it says in the Bible Moses married an Ethiopian woman?' Which, as we all know, it does. But the relevance of that story to his case is at once less direct and more profound than he realised. The story is not saying: 'It's all right to marry a woman of another race – Moses did it.' The underlying preoccupation is rather different. The prohibitions in the Old Testament against marrying foreign women are first and foremost due to the fear that this would lead to apostasy from the religion of Yahweh. The seducing influence of the woman could so easily lead the husband to adopt her faith and cults, as Solomon did, together often with morally objectionable features of the alien worship, and so the covenant unity of the Lord's people would be destroyed, and divine judgment would overwhelm Israel as it had done for the sins of Manasseh. Moses is allowed a liberty forbidden to the rest of the Israelites as a sign of his pre-eminent closeness to Yahweh: 'With him I speak mouth to mouth . . . and he beholds the form of the Lord' (Num. 12.8.) He is so deeply faithful that he can marry a foreign woman without risk. Equally, if a foreign girl was of exceptional goodness, and wished to join herself sincerely to the people of Yahweh, an Israelite might marry such, as Boaz married Ruth and from their union came eventually God's favourite, David. But, for the overwhelming majority of Israelites, there can be no such liberty. So the story, in a sense, was not saying what my friend supposed. In a far deeper sense, however, it supported him 100 per cent, for it said that to a true member of the people of God so-called 'racial' distinctions are simply immaterial. We are all human, and what matters is what we do with our humanness.

Is this, however, not to take too optimistic a view of the Old Testament? It is very easy to fall into the trap of arguing that because some other language or culture does not have a *word* which closely corresponds in meaning to some term in our own, therefore they did not have the same *idea*. (Just as English people used to say that French culture had no notion of what we mean by 'home' simply because they could not think of a simple one-word French equivalent for it!) The assumption on which I have proceeded so far is that racism means 'regarding and treating other human beings as alien or inferior on the basis of certain common heritable physical characteristics'. One has, I believe, to put it that way, because taxonomically 'race' is a complete misuse of terms. Humankind is not even a complete species, but a sub-species. By all the recognised criteria we are all the same sort of animal, in a very sharply defined sense. First, all human groups are inter-fertile. Secondly, we share a common type of blood; provided you match up the blood-group it matters nothing whether you give someone a transfusion from a Mongolid, a Negrid, an Indianid, or any other category of human being. Thirdly, you can transplant organs across these boundaries, and you have no greater rejection problems if you do so than if you restrict yourself to donors seemingly closer in type.

In the Old Testament there are many instances of hatred and contempt towards non-Israelites, and in some cases of laws which seem to exclude them even from proselytisation. 'No Ammonite or Moabite, even down to the tenth generation, shall become a member of the assembly of the Lord' (Deut. 23.3). But the reason given is: 'because they did not meet you with food and water on your way out of Egypt, and because they hired Balaam . . . to revile you.' (Nevertheless, remember Ruth the Moabitess!) By contrast a milder attitude is taken to Edomites and Egyptians: 'You shall not regard an Edomite as an abomination, for he is your own kin; nor an Egyptian, for you were aliens in his land. The third generation of children born to them may become members of the assembly of the Lord' (Deut. 23. 7-8). The mention of 'kin' may sound racist to us, but all the surrounding examples show that what is in mind is still a historical relationship – Esau, Edom's ancestor, was Jacob's brother, and that mutual bond carries down to their descendants.

An instance of revulsion against alleged physical characteristics in a foreigner occurs in Ezekiel. Judah is described as infatuated with the male prostitutes of Babylonia 'whose members were like those of

asses' (23.20). Such a quotation may well recall to us some of the filthier white racist propaganda of our own day, but the cases are not really parallel. The denunciation in Ezekiel is against religious apostasy, itself characterised both as promiscuity and by sexual religious practices. The supposed physical trait is cited by Ezekiel to underline the horror of the religious betrayal.

What one can say is that in general terms the tendency to regard other peoples and nations as tabu or loathsome or cursed by God, for whatever reason, is an all too fertile seed-bed for racism in the strict sense, once that attitude comes into existence. A well-known example here is the way in which old-fashioned Afrikaner fundamentalists have tried to justify the South African combination of *apartheid* with exploitation of black labour by appeal to Genesis 9.20-27, where Ham (putative ancestor of the African nations and of the indigenous Canaanites displaced by Israel: Gen. 10. 6-20) is cursed by Noah, and doomed to be a 'slave of slaves' to his brothers Shem and Japheth, the ancestors of all the other peoples of the world.

There is, therefore, an ambivalence in the Old Testament toward non-Israelites, i.e. Gentiles; and this has carried down into Judaism itself. It would, I believe, be quite improper, even impertinent, for a Christian like myself, who has only a superficial understanding of Judaism, to presume either to blame or to praise. Two things, however, may perhaps be said very tentatively.

First, as regards the current policies of the State of Israel, there are many aspects which sadden and perplex the friendly observer. But my own assessment, for what it is worth, is that where there has been harsh and implacable behaviour toward Arab citizens in Israel, and aggressive action against neighbouring Arab countries, this is to be understood in Old Testament categories not in those of racism. The driving force is the promise of the Land to the Chosen People. Certainly this can seem to swerve dangerously near to racism when the state has become secularised, and many Israelis are atheists. Not that so ethnically heterogeneous a population as that of modern Israel has any 'racial' coherence of its own, but simply that there is a danger that others may be rejected just because they are 'Arab'. Internal discrimination against Arab inhabitants is therefore perhaps the most worrying feature in this context. Nevertheless I still consider that the overriding motive for such persecution is that these Arabs in Israel are identified with the external enemy, sworn to destroy the Israelite state. This identification has been in many cases a tragic injustice, but it is not basically racist.

Secondly, even a modest acquaintance with the history of Judaism since biblical times will show how Jews have wrestled with the question of the place of Gentiles in the Providence of God. There is a wry poignancy about the saying attributed to Rabbi Israel of Koznitz: 'Lord of the world, I beg of you to redeem Israel. And if you do not want to do that, then redeem the Gentiles.' They seem to me words that bear any amount of pondering. Jews have wrestled also with the vision of their own vocation as Servant, as the 'light to the nations', those very nations that have so often cruelly persecuted them. This vocation has often found pure and deeply moving expression from which Christians could learn so much about the role of the Church, as in this Hasidic saying, quoted in the *Forms of Prayer* of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain: 'We should also pray for the wicked among the peoples of the world; we should love them too. As long as we do not pray in this way, as long as we do not love in this way, the Messiah will not come.' This is the distillation of all that is most divine in our common Scriptures.

It is this teaching of utterly unselective love and forgiveness, central to the spiritual wisdom of Jesus, which really ought to make racist attitudes impossible for the Christian. But the New Testament adds further considerations, beginning with the missionary outreach of the church at Antioch, of Peter to the household of Cornelius, of Paul and Barnabas in their early journeys, all ratified by the decision of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15).

Once the Church had gone to the Gentiles the very basis of racism had been cut away, not because Christians had enlarged their horizons and become liberal-minded, but because they were preaching a universal Saviour who by descent and culture was different from those to whom that preaching was directed. We were then at once set firmly on the path which has led to our present situation, in which all the families of the earth are invited to find their Hope and Salvation not in one of their own group but in a first-century Jew. This is compatible with only one world-view, namely that the only 'race' worth considering is the human race, for humanity is all that Jesus shares with us, and so, that the true family of God is humankind. It is in this perspective that St Paul's words about neither Jew nor Greek nor Barbarian nor bond nor free nor male nor female (to collate two Epistles!) are to be understood; and can be applied to the race situation, even though they did not originally have that in mind. This is just another of those areas in

which the Churches are hamstrung in their ethical response unless they are prepared officially and corporately to adopt a critical approach to the Scriptures and judge the Bible in the light of the Bible, saying 'those were partial insights which cannot and must not be taken at their face value or in isolation. The Bible as a whole commits us to deeper and larger views.' Among these not the least to be borne in mind is the relevance of St Paul's teaching about the Body of Christ; for surely we must say as Christians and human beings that the human family as a whole needs the gifts and contributions of all its members, their distinctive sensitivities and wisdoms, and that 'the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you" '.

We must, however, ask ourselves an unhappy question: Given this biblical basis, why is it that Christianity more than any other of the world's great religions has succumbed to the racist disease? The reasons no doubt are complex and historical. They include such factors as the Muslim invasions of Europe, with their consequent identification of anti-God forces with those of different colour; the contempt of Europeans for other cultures, particularly in the era of colonialist expansion, beginning with the Spanish invasions of the New World in the sixteenth century; and the adoption of a missionary policy which refused to see any good whatever in other faiths or ways of life, a policy which particularly in its forcible repression of different approaches in India and China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has had an incalculable influence for evil on the history of the world. But the primary culprit is specifically theological and that is the poison of anti-Judaism, developing into anti-Semitism which Christianity has spewed out from the earliest times. No matter that Jesus was a Jew, that thousands of Jews formed the first Christian churches, that the Jewish Scriptures constituted for nearly 200 years the only Christian Bible. The Jews were those who had rejected and killed the Son of God; and into that indictment Christians were able to funnel all the hatred and humiliation they themselves felt at having been rejected by Judaism. Recent scholarship has opened our eyes to the way in which anti-Judaism, and anti-Jewish propaganda, have infected so much of the New Testament.

In St John's Gospel, 'The Jews' is always a pejorative term; they are a *massa damnata,* Jews who follow Jesus being illogically excluded from that category. In the Passion narratives of both St John and St

Matthew great efforts are made, in different ways, to show that the blame for the death of Jesus rests on the Jews, the leaders principally, but also on all the people. In Acts the vast majority of the Jews are presented as utterly bigoted and unscrupulous in their hostility to and persecution of Christians. With this outlook goes the theological conception of the Church as the 'New Israel'. After the conversion of Constantine, when the Empire began to move over to at least nominal Christianity, all this became worse. The excesses of the mediaeval period, the popular legends about Jews as those who stole, sacrificed and devoured Christian children, and so forth are well known.

The frequent dependence of Christian kings on Jewish money only made matters worse. Moreover the laws which confined Jews to the ghettoes, regulated their dress and so on, emphasised their difference in culture and appearance. A stereotype of the Jew grew up, with Armenian features, greasy curling hair, swarthy skin, sing-song lisping accent; and on to this was projected all the hatred, fear and suspicion, theological, superstitious, and economic. The Reformation did nothing to improve matters. Luther's writings refer again and again to this obsession. Coming to modern times it is quite astonishing now to read the works of such a highly revered and loved Christian writer as G.K. Chesterton and to see how deeply, unthinkingly ingrained in him was a contemptuous, ignorant and misinformed anti-Semitism. It was characteristic of the period. John Buchan shows the same features, to take an example from a totally different background. It is also shattering to our self-esteem to read the newly-published evidence about the resistance of the British authorities to admitting Jewish refugees from Hitler into this country.

The mountain range dividing us from that time is, of course, the Holocaust. It became emotionally repugnant to most people to sneer at such tragic victims; and where evil was so patently on the side of the murderers the supposed evil of Jews blew away like mist, and even the traumas of Irgun Zvai Leumi and the last days of Mandate were not enough to revive it. Anne Frank and others like her had changed all that. But this was not a transformation that owed anything at all to the Christian Gospel nor the influence of the Christian Churches, except possibly the Confessing Churches in Germany and such figures as Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich. Christianity must take a major share of the blame for Nazi genocide,

and also for the earlier pogroms in Russia. Anti-Judaism did not start out as racist; but in alliance with cultural forces it became racist, and we cannot, I think, be comfortably sure that Christian anti-Semitism did not prepare the ground for the racist troubles we have in respect of other communities in this country today. An act of theological penitence, and a conscious and publicly declared re-appraisal of the biblical insights, including a disowning of the distorted features of the New Testament, is essential if the Churches are to address themselves to their part in the racial situation with cleansed consciences.

One further point needs to be briefly made. Racist propaganda constantly makes use of all kinds of slander and defamation, allegedly based on 'facts'. These 'facts' may be pseudo-scientific, as in the misuse of out-of-date statistics about 'intelligence', with no reference at all to modern understanding of the interaction of social and genetic factors in human development and of the cultural bias in all methods of measuring whatever it is intelligence tests are supposed to measure. Once these distortions are recognised and allowed for, the supposed differences in IQ just disappear. Or the 'facts' may be nothing more than anecdotal folk-legend telling us more about our own narrow vision of human life and relationships than about the real characteristics of other groups. Christians may, however, be vulnerable and helpless against such bogus evidence in the racist controversy not because the facts really support racist positions but because Christians have allowed their general world-view and scheme of values on all subjects to come adrift from its biblical and doctrinal roots and to be distorted and inverted by the values of the world. We simply shall never be able to exert real force and influence against the evils of racism so long as our total cultural, social and political vision is that of a civilisation in which racism is endemic. If we share the premises of our fellow-citizens we need not be surprised if we find it hard work to rebut their conclusions.

It is perhaps significant of the blinkers that Christian tradition can wear that we happily read the Pentecost story in Acts 2 about 'Parthians and Medes and Elamites and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, strangers from Rome both Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians', and take to ourselves the credit for their hearing in their own tongues the wonderful works of God, when it was the Old Covenant that

brought them together in a universal fellowship to be available to hear it! Let us look 'to the rock whence we were hewn, and the pit from which we were digged', if we would first exorcise the demon from our own midst. My own favourite text on this matter, and the best with which to conclude is Isaiah 19.24-25: 'When that day comes Israel shall rank with Egypt and Assyria, those three, and shall be a blessing at the centre of the world. Thus shall the Lord of Hosts bless them: A blessing be upon Egypt my people, upon Assyria the work of my hands, and upon Israel my possession.'

THE CHRISTIAN ROOTS OF ANTI-SEMITISM

ROSEMARY RUETHER

The anti-Semitic legacy of Christian civilization cannot be dealt with either as an accidental or as a peripheral element. Nor can it be dismissed as a legacy from 'paganism' or as the product of purely sociological conflicts between the Church and the synagogue. At its root anti-Semitism in Christian civilization springs directly from Christian theological anti-Judaism. It was Christian theology which developed the thesis of the eternal reprobate status of the Jew in history and laid the foundation for the demonic view of the Jews that fanned the flames of popular hatred. This hatred was not only inculcated by Christian preaching and biblical exegesis, but it became incorporated into the structure of both Christian Canon Law and the civil law formed under the Christian Roman emperors expressed in the Codes of Theodosius AD 428 and Justinian (sixth century). The anti-Judaic laws of the Church and the Christian state laid the basis for the inferiorization of the civic and personal status of the Jew in Christian society that lasted until the emancipation of the Jews in the nineteenth century. In this brief essay I wish to summarize some of the central elements of this theological tradition and how it was translated into the social denigration of the Jew in Christendom.

Theologically anti-Judaism developed as the left hand of Christology. That is to say, anti-Judaism was the negative side of the Christian affirmation that Jesus was the Christ. Christianity claimed the Jewish tradition of messianic hope and believed that Jesus fulfilled that hope. But since the Jewish tradition itself rejected this claim, the Church developed its polemic against the Jews (i.e. the Jewish religious tradition) to explain how the Church could claim to be the fulfilment of a Jewish religious tradition which the Jewish religious tradition itself denied. At the root of this dispute lies an essentially different understanding of the messianic role as this developed in Christianity, in contrast to the Old Testament and Jewish tradition.

Judaism looked to the coming of the Messiah as a public, world-historical event which unequivocally overthrew the forces of

evil in the world and established the kingdom of God. Originally Christians also linked Jesus' messianic role intimately to this final salvation of the world. But as this event failed to materialize, Christian theology pushed it off into a vague future i.e. the 'Second Coming' and reinterpreted Jesus' messianic role in inward and personal ways that bore little relation to what the Jewish tradition had meant by the 'coming of the Messiah'. Thus an impasse developed between Christianity and Judaism over messianism, since the Christian view of the messianic coming was fundamentally unacceptable to Judaism.

But the real differences between these two views have never really been discussed between Christians and Jews, because at an early stage of development this difference was covered over by communal alienation and mutual polemic. Christianity sought to reconcile its view of the messianic coming with that of the Old Testament (the very term 'Old Testament' is itself a Christian anti-Judaic interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures). At the same time Christian exegesis sought to prove that the Jews had ever been apostate from God and their religious leaders spiritually blind and hard of heart in order to explain the Jewish rejection of the Christian interpretation of the messianic tradition. Christian theology, in effect, set out to prove the rejected status of the Jewish community and the spiritual blindness of its tradition of exegesis and spirituality in order to vindicate the correctness of its own exegesis and its claim to be the rightful heir of Israel's election.

The Christian polemic against Judaism did not stop merely with proving the special guilt of the religious leaders of the Jewish community for the death of Jesus (today recognized to be a dubious thesis). Rather it quickly ramified out into arguments intended to prove the inability of the teachers of this community to read Scripture rightly and the discredited status of Jewish religious law, worship and even their past history back to Moses. In Christian exegesis of the Jewish Scriptures, Jewish history is split down the middle. There is the attempt to prove that there has always existed, in the divine intentionality, a true people of faith who are the rightful heirs of the promise to Abraham, over against a fallen, disobedient people who never obeyed God or heard the prophets and who, from the beginning, rejected and even killed the prophets and so could be expected to reject and even kill the Messiah, the promised redeemer of the prophetic tradition, when he appeared. This comes to be seen

as the logical climax of the evil history of the Jewish people. It is the Church which is the true heir to the promise to Abraham. It is the spiritual community of faith, foretold by the prophets, while the 'Jews' (that is to say, that religious community that continues to gather around the temple and synagogue and the rabbinic leadership, and which rejects the Church's Christological interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures) were the heir to this evil history of perfidy, apostasy and murder. As a result the Jewish people have been cut off from their divine election. Divine wrath has been poured down on them in the destruction of the temple and the national centre in Jerusalem. They have been driven into exile and reprobation until the end of time, when Jesus will return as the Christ and the Jews will finally have to acknowledge their error.

These are the main outlines of the polemic against the Jews as it developed in the exegetical tradition that underlies the New Testament and hardened into a fixed form in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition in the Church Fathers. Many of the basic themes of this tradition were already set within the New Testament; for example, the ideas that the Jewish people have always killed the prophets and so will kill the Messiah when he comes, as predicted by the prophets; that their worship and religious leaders are discredited; that their teachers are 'blind guides'; that their spirituality is hypocrisy and lacks the capacity to save; that the law was given not to save, but to reveal sin; and, finally, that the Jews have lost their election, which has been transferred to the Gentile Church and that the destruction of Jerusalem is the sign of their present reprobate status. However these arguments were greatly elaborated in the writings of the Church Fathers in the period between the second and fifth centuries in a way that hardened the lines between the two communities.

The themes of the patristic anti-Judaic polemic centre around two main theses: (1) the rejection of the Jews and election of the Gentile Church, and (2) the abrogation of the law. As in the New Testament, the Jewish rejection of the Messiah is read back into the Old Testament as a heritage of evil-doing that culminated in this final act of apostasy. The Jews are said to have always rejected the prophets, refused to hear their message of repentance and to have even killed them. Moreover the Jews are said to be inveterate idol worshippers. Beginning with the golden calf, the Jews turned from God and worshipped idols. God sent the prophets to rebuke this idol worship, but to no avail. This thesis is proved by reading the

prophets one-sidedly, forgetting that the context of the prophetic message was, in fact, the acceptance of this message by the Jewish religious tradition! Even worse crimes are hinted at, again using prophetic and psalmic texts out of context.

The Jews are said to have been cannibals and to have sacrificed their children to idols. All manner of debauchery, lewdness and immorality are also added to the list of crimes said to characterize the evil character of 'the Jews'. By the time we reach writers such as St John Chrysostom in the late fourth century, this picture of the Jews in Christian writings has taken on demonic proportions. The Jews come to be painted as preternatural demonic figures with a superhuman appetite for every depravity of flesh and spirit.

The Mosaic law is said to have been given to the Jews, not as a special mark of election and favour by God, but rather to curb this incorrigible proclivity for idolatry and vice. As the fourth century Church historian Eusebius puts it. 'Everything which the Law forbids, they had previously done without restraint'(*Demonstrations of the Gospel,* Bk. 1). Some of the Church Fathers postulate a pre-Mosaic period before the law when patriarchal humanity obeyed God from the heart, guided only by the natural law implanted in the conscience. Christianity is said to have restored this patriarchal era of spiritual obedience. Mosaic religion is therefore painted as an era of fall. The giving of the law comes to represent not a special grace, but a punitive restraint on the special viciousness of the Jews, who are presumed to have picked up their proclivity for idolatry and unnatural vice during their stay in Egypt!

The hermeneutical method for demonstrating this tale of evil Jewish history consists of splitting the right from the left hand of the prophetic message. All the negative descriptions, judgments and threats are taken out of context and read monolithically as descriptive of 'the Jews'. The positive side of the prophetic message, the traits of repentance, faith and future promise, are said to apply to the future Church. The heroes of the Old Testament become the lineage of the Church, while the Jews are regarded as a people 'on probation' who fail the tests and are finally cast off by God.

By splitting prophetic judgment from prophetic hope, applying one side to the Jews and the other to the Church, one gains an unrelieved tale of apostasy supposedly characteristic of the Old Testament people, while depriving the Church of the tradition of

prophetic self-criticism. Anti-Judaism and ecclesial triumphalism thus arise as two sides of the same antithesis.

The final crime of this evil history is the killing of the Messiah. Indeed it was to give this 'crime' a heritage and 'tradition' that Christian apologetics read Jewish history in this manner. As Christology is heightened to the full doctrine of Nicene faith, this comes to be seen not simply as the killing of the final prophet, but as the killing of God, the crime of 'deicide', a crime of treason and *lèse majesté* against the sovereign of the universe. For criminals of such a stamp no vituperation is too extreme, as can be seen in the sermons of John Chrysostom who speaks of the Jews continuously as devils, their synagogues as brothels of the devil and the very souls of Jews as dwelling places of demons.

For this final crime the Jews are exiled and their election has been revoked. Their city has been destroyed and their cult place ravished, never to be rebuilt. All their former favour with God and tokens of election have been taken from them. They have been driven into captivity among their enemies, there never to know any cessation of misery until the end of time. The Fathers are fond of using the mistranslated phrase from Psalm 69.23 'Their back bend thou down always' to represent this historical status of the Jews since the time of Jesus (see, for example, the treatises against the Jews by Hippolytus and by Augustine). The former captivities of the Jews are said to have had limits set by God, and the restorations promised in the Scriptures refer to these former restorations. But this final exile has no limits and is intended by God to last to the end of time.

Thus Christian theology took a dogmatic stance which denied the possibility that the Jewish people would ever be restored to their national homeland (a tradition not without significance for present Jewish-Christian misunderstandings over Christian relations to the state of Israel). According to patristic tradition the Jews are to remain in this status of exile and reprobation until Jesus returns in glory and the Jews are given the final chance to acknowledge their mistake. In this framework, pressure on the Jewish community to convert to Christianity also took on an eschatological significance for Christians, since the mass conversion of the Jews was supposed to signal the approach of the coming of Christ. Even circumcision is said to have been given to the Jews, not as a sign of election, but as a witness to their reprobation that they might be recognized as Jews and prevented from re-entering the city of Jerusalem from which

they had been barred after the Jewish wars. Circumcision thus becomes reinterpreted as a kind of 'mark of Cain' by which the Jews are to be preserved to the end of time as a wandering reprobate people. The political overtones of this view are evident in the following passage from the fourth century Christian poet Prudentius: 'From place to place the homeless Jew wanders in ever shifting exile since the time when he was torn from the abode of his fathers and has been suffering the penalty for murder and having stained his hands with the blood of Christ whom he denied, paying the price of sin. . . This noble race (is) . . . scattered and enslaved . . . it is in captivity under the younger faith . . . A race that was formerly unfaithful confesses Christ (the Gentiles) and triumphs. But that which denied Christ is conquered and subdued and has fallen into the hands of masters who keep the faith' (*Apotheosis,* 541-550.).

This anti-Judaic tradition grew into a fixed standpoint between the second and fourth centuries. It was repeated over and over again in every Christian sermon, biblical commentary or theological treatise that touched on the Jews. And since Christians claimed Jewish Scriptures as their own and understood themselves as the heirs of the election of Israel, it was difficult to preach or teach anything without touching on the Jews in some way. Then, in the fourth century, the Church was transformed from a persecuted sect to the established religion of the empire. By A.D. 380 orthodox Christianity had become the exclusive faith of all citizens of this empire. The faith and practice of pagans and heretics was proscribed by law. Their temples and churches were destroyed or confiscated. Toward the Jews, however, the attitude was more complicated. The Jews had gained a protected status in Roman law. They were Roman citizens at this time, and their right to worship and govern their communities internally by Jewish law was guaranteed. Moreover, although Christian theology decreed misery for the Jews, it did not decree extermination. Indeed it demanded the on-going existence of the Jews, although in a status of reprobation, as the continuing witness to the triumph of the Church and the final witness to Christ at the end of time. Thus the paradox of the Church's attitude to the Jews was that it was simultaneously committed to the preservation of the Jews and, at the same time, to making them exhibit externally the marks of their reprobation. It was out of this contradiction that the tragic history of the Jews in Christian society was to flow.

By the fourth century the Christian view of the Jews began to be

enacted into law by the Christian emperors. The basic principle of this legislation was that the Jews should be allowed the bare minimum of continued right to worship, but that they should have no honour in Christian society and should be removed from any possibility of holding authority over Christians. The Jews were forbidden from circumcizing and then from owning slaves. Since Jewish families incorporated their servants into their households religiously, this was intended to remove a potent source of influence of Jews over Christians (remembering that Christians themselves had risen from the slave class).

Severe laws were passed forbidding Jews from converting Christians to Judaism, and also against any interference with the Church's conversion of Jews to Christianity. Although Jews were allowed to worship, laws forbade them from building new synagogues or repairing old ones. By the fifth century the public recognition of the Jewish patriarch and his delegates was withdrawn, a severe blow to the ability of Judaism to communicate throughout the Diaspora. Jews were forbidden from holding any civil or military office and barred from the *cursus honorum* of the state. They could not be judges or represent themselves in court. The idea that a Jew might hold authority over a Christian is termed in one law in the Theodosian canon 'an insult to out faith'. The laws bristle with theologically loaded epithets which condemn the Jews as a vicious people, and the synagogue is even referred to in one law as a 'brothel' (*C. Th.* 16/8/1). Since agriculture and industry were carried out by slaves (later serfs), exclusion from holding slaves eliminated Jews from agriculture and large industry. In addition to these civil laws the Church added laws condemning intermarriage or religious fraternization of any kind between Jews and Christians. The Church also incorporated the civil anti-Judaic laws into ecclesiastical codes and passed these down to the Germanic states that succeeded the Western Roman empire.

By the late fourth century this official persecution of the Jews was supplemented by outbreaks of popular violence against the Jews in the form of synagogue burnings, expulsions and forced baptisms. The emperors sought to hold the line against these popular excesses, usually led by fanatical monks. But bishops often justified this violence and rebuked the emperor when he sought reparations for the Jewish community (see the epistles of St Ambrose, 40 and 41).

Thus through a combination of official inferiorization from the

Church and Christian state and hatred whipped up by popular preachers, the ghetto was gradually shaped around the Jewish community in Christendom until practices such as the 'Jewish badge' and the ghetto walls became institutions by the late Middle Ages. The status of the Jew as a person without honour or civil rights in Christian society was to last until modern times and was swept away in Eastern Europe only by the Nazi Holocaust itself!

The translation of theological vituperation into popular hatred was by no means automatic. Although popular pogroms took place in the fourth and fifth centuries in Syria and Alexandria, where communal tension between Jews and other groups could be fanned into flames by the new theological views, many other Christians continued to fraternize with the Jewish community and to regard Jewish observances as their own. Large groups of Judaizers in Antioch in the late fourth century continued to frequent the synagogue, especially on high holidays. This fact provided the basis for John Chrysostom's eight vitriolic sermons against the Jews preached at the time of the high holidays. In Byzantine society Jews were strictly reduced to a low social and economic status and official clerical vituperation against them alternated with imperial efforts at forced baptisms. But the tradition of intense popular hatred never developed. This seems to have been partly due to the fact that theological-legal anti-Semitism was never translated into economic terms.

In the West, however, where the city and the money economy failed, the fact that the Jews were the one group that could maintain contact between the Christian West and the trade route of the East, held by the Muslims, made the Jews the catalysts to Western economic revival. Jews also played a key role in the redevelopment of the money economy.

But these roles, when combined with the Church's view of the Jews as reprobate and its attempt to confine them to a status without authority in Christian society, resulted in a structuring of the Jewish community into a peculiar economic role. The Jews were forbidden the normal range of economic possibilities. They could be neither farmers nor industrialists (being excluded from the guilds). Their role as merchants was largely expropriated by the Christians at the time of the crusades. Thus the Jews became the moneylenders (not the only moneylenders by any means; the Italians and others were more than their rivals) for Christian princes. This placed the Jews in

the position of living by their wits as economic innovators, while being forced to function simultaneously as the economic agents and the economic scapegoats for the European ruling class. The financial success of an elite group of Jews was transferred to the coffers of princes, while the financial failure of the princes' policies generated a hatred which was transferred to the Jewish community. It was this combination of theological vituperation, legal-social inferiorization and economic scapegoating that created a worsening image of the Jew in the Middle Ages. At the time of the Crusades, mass popular massacres broke out against the Jews. These events taught the people that the Jewish community, although officially protected by the princes, was actually an easy mark for any mob. Once this lesson had been learned, popular violence against the Jews at times of social crisis never ceased. New myths, such as the stories that Jews killed Christian children and drank their blood on Passover, violated Christian sacraments and poisoned wells, were created to excuse these outbreaks and to foment new ones. By the late Middle Ages the Jew had been transformed into a full-blown devil in Christian popular mythology, complete with horns, a tail and a peculiar stench.

The Christian theological doctrine that the Jew was reprobate in history to the end of time thus translated itself into a practice of social denigration to 'prove' this status or reprobation through the outward evidence of social misery. This, in turn, interacted with social and economic factors, until it became transformed into what we must now recognize to be a state of *mass paranoia* toward the Jewish community in Christian popular culture. If the misery of the Jew is necessary to prove his reprobate status and the triumph of the Church, it follows then that any social prospering of the Jew in Christian society or any power he accrues over Christians will be regarded as an affront to Christian society and an implicit attack on Christian faith. It was this mass paranoia that flourished in rampant form in the late Middle Ages and lasted into the age of the ghetto. This was just beginning to dissipate in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout Western and then in Eastern Europe, when it was revived by Nazism as a tool for doctrines which had little to do with Christian faith!

NEW TESTAMENT ANTI-SEMITISM: FACT OR FABLE?

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The issue of New Testament anti-Semitism has generated considerable scholarly research in both the Christian and Jewish communities during the course of the last decade or so. While some consensus has developed regarding the major problems that need to be faced, we are far from consensus regarding either the causal or contemporary dimensions of these problems. If we have learned one thing from this extensive research it is that any simplistic affirmations or denials of New Testament anti-Semitism should be discarded out of hand. The question is highly complex. In saying this I am not trying to whitewash the historical record. On many occasions Christians clearly used New Testament texts as a pretext for the persecution and slaughter of the Jewish people. But this historical fact does not necessarily mean the churches were correctly interpreting their biblical canon. Contemporary concern about the abiding presence of anti-Semitism in our society, including its ecclesiastical realms, must never deter us from sound scholarship on the subject.

In the following pages I shall attempt to present a brief overview of some of the critical questions surrounding possible New Testament anti-Semitism. It will not be possible to engage in detailed exegesis of all the relevant New Testament texts. It is my hope, however, that this essay will introduce readers to the basic parameters of the discussions as they have been defined by a multiplicity of scholars in recent years.

Probably no other accusation against the Jewish people by Christianity with a seeming New Testament basis has been responsible for more Jewish suffering throughout history than the deicide charge. Simply put, this was the accusation that the Jewish community of Jesus' time, in their blindness and spiritual haughtiness, put to death the very Son of God. This claim laid the groundwork for a highly developed theology within Christianity which claimed that Jews, for the remainder of human history, were to be subjected to continual suffering and to live in a state of perpetual wandering without a homeland as a punishment for this monumental crime. Without doubt this accusation played a major role in the acceptance by so many Christians of the Nazi Final Solution of the Jewish problem. While not the primary cause of this genocidal attack it provided an indispensable seedbed for its popular acceptance.[1]

The Christian churches have moved a long way toward eliminating the deicide charge from their teaching and liturgy. This without doubt must be seen as the greatest single advancement in Christian-Jewish relations since the declaration of the II Vatican Council and similar statements from leading Protestant denominations. This does not mean, nonetheless, that the accusation is part of a legacy that is now history. For the more traditional beliefs regarding responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus continue to linger in popular culture (both secular and religious) and piety.

New Testament scholars are virtually unanimous in agreeing that the death of Jesus was instigated by the Roman imperial government as a political execution. While there may well have been some collaboration by the priestly elite of the Jerusalem Temple in this effort, it must be remembered that this priestly elite was not held in high favour by many Jews of the period, as research into Jewish materials from the period has clearly uncovered. In one of the few areas of widespread scholarly consensus with regard to New Testament anti-Semitism primal responsibility for Jesus' death has been assigned to the Roman government.

Oscar Cullmann is but one of many prominent New Testament scholars who have pinpointed Roman rather than Jewish guilt in the execution of Jesus. In his study on Jesus' relationship to the revolutionary movements of his time Cullmann has concluded that Jesus was a prisoner of the Romans, arrested by a cohort in the Garden of Gethsemane on Pilate's orders. The actual trial of Jesus

was in the hands of Pilate – hence clearly a political trial.

> Thus Jesus suffered the Roman death penalty, crucifixion, and the inscription, the 'titulus', above the cross named as his crime the Zealotist attempt of having strived for kingly rule in Israel, a country still administered by the Romans.[2]

This same position has been unqualifiedly stated by the Catholic exegete Bruce Vawter:

> The Gospels represent the Crucifixion as a Roman execution precipitated at the initiative and with the complicity of some highly placed Jews, chiefly of the high priestly, Sadducean element.

Theological motivations, Vawter goes on to say, were primary in the narratives of Jesus' death. Hence the actual details have 'to be reconstructed rather than read from them. There seems to be no doubt that Jewish responsibility has been heightened at the expense of the Roman . . .'[3]

If the churches are once and for all to eliminate the anti-Semitic potential inherent in the crucifixion narrative they will have to develop within their members a much better understanding of the Second Temple Judaism period in Judaism. This period in which Jesus was born and ministered was one marked by tremendous upheaval in Judaism. Certainly legalism and corruption were to be found. This was especially true within segments of the high priestly elite in Jerusalem. But these distortions of authentic Judaism were being denounced by new movements within the community such as Pharisaism. Though Jesus' stance was unique in a number of crucial theological areas, his personal critique of the spiritual/political leadership of his time was shared by many of his Jewish brothers and sisters. It was this criticism which brough him to death on Calvary.

The real picture surrounding the events of the crucifixion, then, is not Jesus as an isolated prophet but rather Jesus standing in concert with the progressive movements in Judaism such as the Pharisees over against the small group of Jews who were collaborators with the oppressive Roman authorities. Until we re-associate Jesus with the wider Jewish struggle of the period against spiritual and political oppression, the crucifixion narrative will continue to carry the seeds of anti-Semitism despite the official condemnations of the deicide charge. Most Christians still view the situation as Jesus and themselves in opposition to the totality of the Jewish community when they read the passion accounts. In actual fact, however, the

passion story, apart from its later theological interpretations, should in fact serve as a source of unity between Jews and Christians, not as a source of the division and hostility we have witnessed for centuries. The Jewish historian Ellis Rivkin has made this point as well as anyone. Rivkin says that the question of 'Who crucified Jesus?' needs to be rephrased as 'What crucified Jesus?' As he sees it, Jesus died a victim of Roman imperial policy, of a type of regime 'which, throughout history, is forever crucifying those who would bring human freedom, insight, or a new way of looking at man's relationship to man'. If any Jews collaborated with the Romans in this venture, then they too deserve condemnation. The masses of Jews, however, who felt so stifled under Roman domination that they were to stage an outright revolt against its tyrannical authority a few years later, cannot be blamed for the death of Jesus. Rather, insists Rivkin.

> In the crucifixion their own plight of helplessness, humiliation and subjection was clearly written on the cross itself. By nailing to the cross one who claimed to be the messiah to free human beings, Rome and its collaborators indicated their attitude toward human freedom.[4]

Making the connection between the suffering and death of Jesus and the suffering being endured by the Jewish people in Roman controlled Palestine should become one of the most important emphases of the church's proclamation of the crucifixion narrative, if we wish to finally undercut its anti-Semitic potential. The deicide charge will not completely be laid to rest until such a perspective becomes widespread within the Christian community. The problem is, however, that such a perspective is not easily developed from a simple reliance on the gospel texts dealing with the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Hence utilization of additional background material from modern scholarship on the Second Temple period is vital if the historical situation is ever to be understood as it actually was. Despite these difficulties the recent research surrounding the deicide charge does give us hope that the New Testament is not as inherently anti-Semitic as some have claimed.

Consideration of the historic deicide charge provides an entrée into the broader issue of New Testament anti-Semitism as a whole. Is the New Testament's overall portrayal of Jesus' relationship with the Jewish community of his time to be classified as anti-Semitic? Several contemporary scholars have taken up this question over the last decade or so. Gregory Baum, Bruce Vawter, Jules Isaac, Samuel

Sandmel, Paul Kirsch, Joseph Grassi, John Dominic Crossan and John Townsend are but a few of the names that have involved themselves in the debate. The most provocative challenge to usual Christian thinking on this question is Rosemary Ruether's controversial volume *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism.*[5] Her contention is that the theological statements about Christ developed by the New Testament to interpret the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death are in fact anti-Judaic at their core. This is especially the case with the gospel of John. For Ruether, to use an oft-quoted phrase of hers. 'anti-Judaism is the left hand of Christology'.

Before proceeding to examine Ruether's claims in further detail it would be useful to look at the general approach of earlier Christian scholars who have dealt with the topic. While differing on some specific points, the vast majority of pre-Ruether discussions of the subject of New Testament anti-Semitism wound up concluding that it was devoid of any real anti-Semitic outlook. Rather the opposition toward the Jews evident in the Christian Scriptures was seen as arising from five factors: (1) concrete hostility between Jews and Christians in their early contest for converts; (2) fear of the Roman authorities which tended to downplay imperial responsibility for the death of Jesus at the expense of Jewish culpability; (3) total misunderstanding of the so-called 'Judaizers' denounced in the later Pauline epistles such as Galatians; (4) failure on the part of the later Christian community to recognize many of the supposedly anti-Jewish passages as merely a continuation of Jewish prophetic language intended primarily for members of the apostolic community rather than a judgment upon Judaism; and (5) disputes about Jewish law that were raging within Judaism itself at the time of the church's birth and which got incorporated into the New Testament.

Gregory Baum's volume *Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?*[6] was typical of the usual Christian approach. Its general conclusion was that any anti-Jewish trends that arose in Christian history were the product of post-biblical distortion, in no direct way reflective of actual New Testament teaching. Baum basically explained any apparently hostile comments towards Jews and Judaism according to three groundrules. In the first place, there were passages addressed specifically to the Jewish community of Jerusalem to which Jesus belonged. These passages were aimed at the unfaithful members of

the community. Having ignored Jesus' preaching they were perceived as under divine judgment. It was only later generations that misguidedly turned these statements into generalized Christian indictments of the Jewish people as a whole.

Baum's second interpretative principle argued that many of the statements in the New Testament which attribute blindness and hardness of heart to the Jews should be considered prophetic declarations made by Christians belonging to the people of Israel in the hope of touching the hearts of their Jewish brothers and sisters and converting them to the Christian faith. In this perspective such derogatory passages were not intended as descriptions of the entirety of first-century Judaism. Rather they should be seen as exhortatory sermons, partly prophetic and partly polemical, uttered by people who still regarded themselves as loyal members of the people Israel and whose goal was to lead their compatriots to the acceptance of the gospel message. Such passages, Baum maintained, acquired their anti-Semitic overtones only when they fell into the hands of gentile Christians who used them to judge Jewish religion as a whole.

Thirdly, Baum proposed that many sections of the New Testament which present a negative portrait of the scribes and Pharisees as well as other opponents of Jesus never meant to offer an historically accurate account of these groups. They aimed rather at exposing the deformations and pathologies which threaten religious expression in all ages and at initiating the Christian church itself into a spirit of critical self-examination. Jesus' conflict with various Jewish factions in his own time became symbolic for the New Testament writers of the perpetual conflict between authentic and inauthentic religion within Christianity. It was the unwillingness on the part of Christians to acknowledge this and to arrive at critical self-knowledge that led to the projection of this criticism onto the entire Jewish community. In so doing the church attempted to avoid the judgment of the gospel on its own life and practice.

Baum subsequently modified his position. In his introduction to Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide,* he rejects his earlier defence of the New Testament with regard to the roots of anti-Semitism. We shall come back to his current position later on in this essay.

The rather classical defence of the epistles and gospels offered by Baum in his initial consideration of the question was repeated in large measure in the writings of Bruce Vawter. In order properly to

interpret the New Testament on the question of anti-Semitism Vawter insists we need to begin with the assumption that the gospels and epistles were marked by a fundamentally polemical goal. Hence they sometimes tend to be oversimplified and one-sided, easily open to current misiterpretation. Historically Vawter understands the following factors as having contributed to New Testament tone setting with respect to Jews and Judaism: (1) Jewish hostility toward the new Christian community of the first century which was part of a mutual enmity; (2) the tendency of the biblical authors to write in absolute terms. This is the case he believes with some of the references to 'the Jews' who become, particularly in John, representatives of the unbelieving generation which confronted Jesus and the early church; and (3) the apocalyptic tone of New Testament thought which pitted the forces of good against the powers of evil in uncompromising language which condemns without qualification all those who refused to accept Jesus' message (new Israel versus old Israel). One might add here a point that Vawter himself does not make: from the Qumran literature we now know that such language was fairly commonplace in Jesus' time.

Vawter thus recognizes a certain unquestionable hostility toward Jews in the New Testament. But it was only later Christian generations, reading the epistles and gospels uncritically, who constructed the popular forms of Christian anti-Semitism that were never intended by the New Testament authors. As Vawter sees it, the gospels did not represent Jesus as rejected by the Jews of his time nor as handed over by them to the Roman authorities for execution. 'On the contrary', he says, 'without exception they record his enormous popularity with "the people" or "the crowds" both in Galilee and Judea, and they portray the circumstances of the crucifixion as precipitated by a small and desperate cabal of men who had to do their work covertly for fear of arousing against themselves a general rebellion of their own people. The anti-Jewish hostility of the Gospels, in other words, is selective.'[7]

Vawter seconds the position of Oscar Cullmann regarding primary Roman responsibility for the execution of Jesus. While he feels that there was complicity in this act by certain members of the Sadducean priestly elite, he points to the evaluation of this group offered by the noted Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz who described the Temple in Jesus' time as having been directed by people whose chief hallmarks were avarice and greed for power.[8]

Vawter likewise is of the opinion that Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus has been heightened by some of the gospel writers at the expense of Roman culpability in order to lessen the threat of imperial harassment of the early Christian community. In particular Vawter insists, the image of Pontius Pilate has been cleaned up in Matthew, Mark and Luke based on what we know about him from other historical sources. The lone exception to this trend is the gospel of John where Pilate is definitely grouped with the evil and unbelieving multitudes who shun the truth of the gospel.

Another explanation of supposed New Testament anti-Semitism which follows the lines laid out above is found in the earlier writings of the prominent Johannine scholar Raymond Brown. In his introduction to the Anchor Bible translation of the fourth gospel Brown discusses the evangelist's use of the term 'the Jews' which has been frequently pointed to as an example of gospel anti-Semitism. His research shows that John employs this term some seventy times in his gospel. Yet, says Brown, in only a few instances is the term used as a designation for the real, historical Jewish community of the period. In great part John uses 'the Jews' as a technical title. It symbolizes all those people who are opposed to the teaching of Jesus and refuse to accept him as Lord. And in view of the context in which Brown understands the fourth gospel to have been written, he interprets this as referring to those men and women who opposed Christianity in the late first century wherever they might have lived:

> It is quite clear that in many instances the term 'the Jews' has nothing to do with ethnic, geographical, or religious differentiation. People who are ethnically, religiously and even geographically Jews . . . are distinguished from the Jews. For instance, in John 9.22 the parents of the blind man, obviously Jews themselves, are said to 'fear the Jews'.[9]

Thus, as originally analyzed by Brown, 'the Jews' in John constitute a theological category, symbolizing any person, Christian or non-Christian, Jewish or pagan, who would reject with full knowledge the news of salvation through Christ. In sum, Brown states without equivocation his overall assessment of John: 'John is not anti-Semitic; the evangelist is condemning not race or people but opposition to Jesus.[10]

We shall subsequently see that, like Gregory Baum, Brown has modified his position to some degree regarding the anti-Semitic factor in John. Before that, however, it would be useful to look briefly at explanations dealing with Pauline attitudes toward the

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Jewish people since up to this point we have focused almost exclusively on the gospels. On one hand, an epistle like Romans is frequently appealed to by those advocating improved Christian-Jewish relations today as a good starting-point for a new Christian theology of the synagogue. On the other hand, many of Paul's remarks about the Torah seem to some to bespeak a deep hostility to Jewish law that serves as the very basis for the traditionally damaging contrast between Judaism and Christianity as religions of law and of love respectively. And the at times almost vitriolic denunciations of the so-called 'Judaizers' in Galatians further complicate the image of the Pauline school regarding Judaism.

Several Christian exegetes who have been active in the Christian-Jewish dialogue have come to the defence of the Pauline writings on the question of their anti-Semitic bias. Markus Barth feels that much of the blame for unwarranted distortions of Judaism supposedly developed out of teachings found in the epistles is in fact due to inaccurate interpretations of the Pauline message by later scholars. These Pauline interpreters depicted him as a rugged individualist who opted for a religion of mystical experience, ethical quietism, psychic introversion and almost satanic overestimation of sin in resolute opposition to a Jewish or Judaeo-Christian religion of tradition, discipline, group responsibility and ethical commitment. Barth insists that such an outlook fails to do full justice to Pauline thought. Paul did not merely abandon priestly sacrifice and circumcision. Rather he magnified both by showing what good resulted for all people by the one sacrifice made on the cross. Not the destruction but the renewal of the Israel of God was his goal. 'Just as Moses offered his life to God', says Barth, 'to make, if possible, atonement for his people', so Paul writes. 'For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race' (Exodus 32.32: Romans 9.3).[11] A man who writes in this manner, Barth feels, can hardly be termed an anti-Semite.

Barth places Paul squarely in the tradition of the biblical prophets who frequently chose to address harsh and challenging words to their own people. But this does not prove that Paul hated or despised Jews any more than Jeremiah:

> When Paul posits a spiritual temple as over against the building of stone; when he calls for circumcision of the heart, not of the flesh only; when he puts righteousness and love, brotherliness and humility, full obedience

and faith above all virtues and accomplishments claimed by some of his contemporaries, then he wages a typically Jewish war.[12]

According to Barth's understanding of Pauline thought, Israel continues to give honour and glory to God even after the resurrection of Christ. Israel's task remains to give witness to God's existence, covenant, and blessing among the Gentiles. Paul sees a continuing Jewish mission to the nations. And for that reason, Barth insists that any Christian attempts to proselytize Jews are repugnant to the very heart of the Pauline message. For Barth the full idea of salvation in the Pauline body of literature still retains its basic Jewish social character. Salvation is something that will be realized at the end of history when church and synagogue are finally reconciled.[13]

With respect to the problem of the people usually referred to as 'Judaizers' in Galatians, Barth makes the point that they were most likely not born Jews but Gentile Christians. Otherwise they would not have isolated circumcision from the other 612 commandments of the Torah and considered it as a substitute for observing the entire Law. Also, if they had been Jewish Christians, they would have been circumcised at birth. but the epistle indicates that they were only in the process of accepting circumcision. Paul's venom is thus directed against ritualistic, pagan-born distorters of the gospel message, not against Jews or Jewish Christians. His condemnation of them sprang as much from his own 'liberal' understanding of Judaism as from his acceptance of the teachings of Jesus. Paul's line of argument in this regard parallels to some degree the rabbinic teaching of the period which held, for example, that the Adamite and Noahite commandments need not be fully imposed upon Gentiles for them to attain participation in the coming final kingdom.

Barth warns, as a result of his research into the question of the opponents of the Pauline message in Galatians, that it is misleading to refer to them as 'Judaizers'. This label conveys an anti-Semitic ring and suggests that Jewish-born Christians were forcing upon free Gentile Christians some unnecessary or even harmful components of their Jewish heritage. And historically this simply was not the case.

Another New Testament scholar who has looked extensively at the issue of the Jews in Pauline theology is Krister Stendahl. In an essay that has now become somewhat of a classic, Stendahl argues in a vein similar to Barth. He believes that what he terms a 'Western introspective mentality' has been imposed on the writings of Paul by his interpreters in Western Christianity, especially those related to

the Protestant tradition. Stendahl is quite convinced that such interpretations fundamentally disfigure Paul's real teaching and intensify the Jewish-Christian tension:

> . . . Paul's statements about 'justification by faith' have been hailed as the answer to the problem which faces the ruthlessly honest man in his practice of introspection. Especially in Protestant Christianity which, however, at this point has its roots in Augustine and in the piety of the Middle Ages the Pauline awareness of sin has been interpreted in the light of Luther's struggle with his conscience. But it is exactly at that point that we can discern the most drastic difference between Luther and Paul, between the sixteenth and the first century, and perhaps between Eastern and Western Christianity.[14]

Luther's struggle with his own conscience read in the framework of late medieval piety led him to interpret Pauline statements as answers to the quest for assurance about personal salvation out of a common human predicament. And Luther's own struggle became a model for the way many subsequent Christians conceived of the Pauline debate with the Jewish tradition. Paul, however, was not concerned primarily with the personal struggle as Stendahl sees it, but with the possibility for Gentiles to be included in the messianic community.

With respect to the famous chapters in Romans (9-11) where Paul offers theological reflections on the Jewish-Christian relationship, Stendahl believes Paul intended here to attack directly what he perceived as unwarranted superiority feelings on the part of Gentile Christians over against the people Israel. The mysterious co-existence he posits between Jews and Christians is designed to counter the spiritually haughty attitude he picked up among Roman Christians. It may not be coincidental in Stendahl's eyes that for four pages in the Greek text (10.17 to the end of chapter 11) we do not find even a single mention of Christ. And the doxology concluding this section is the only Pauline one that refrains from a Christological emphasis. The dominant motif here, Stendahl, observes is 'God language':

> Now if this language usage is conscious it is interesting; if it is unconscious it is even more interesting. Nobody could ever claim that Paul did not have the guts to wave the Christ flag, that he would fall short of evaengelistic zeal and zest. Whatever flaws there are in the great apostle, this is not one of them. That is why this absence of Christ language, this changing of thinking into God language, is so striking. Paul is actually teaching a mysterious coexistence. [15]

In light of this understanding of Romans 9-11 it is impossible in Stendahl's judgment to accuse Paul of anti-Semitism. While he may have been guilty of minor indiscretions at times regarding Jews, his major theological reflection on the church's link with Judaism reveals a love and respect so profound that it completely wipes out the validity of any other comments he might have made during his missionary career.

Having examined representative arguments for the claim that the New Testament is not basically anti-Semitic, we need now to look at the counter-arguments. As indicated earlier, probably no thesis advocating that the roots of traditional anti-Semitism lie in the New Testament itself has received as much attention as that put forward by Rosemary Ruether. In *Faith and Fratricide* she tries to demonstrate that the term 'Jews', as used in the gospels, Acts and the Pauline writings, signifies the Jewish religious community. As a result the word 'Jews' took on the role of a hostile symbol for all those men and women who dare to resist and reject the gospel teaching. She finds that the book of Acts utilizes the term in this hostile sense some forty-five times, while the term 'a Jew', 'Jews', or 'Jewish' is applied to Christians on less than ten occasions. On the grounds of her extensive research Ruether has become convinced that

> Judaism, represented by its dominant religious consciousness, was hopelessly apostate and represented a heritage of apostasy which merited its rejection as the true guardian of the vineyard of Israel and the election of the Gentiles instead.[16]

She attributes this perspective not to Gentile converts, but to alienated and angry Jewish sectarians who were certain they possessed the true interpretation of the Scriptures and were the cornerstone of God's people, but experienced rejection and rebuff at every turn from the synagogue leadership.

Ruether also stresses the shifting of blame in the gospels for the deaths of Jesus and his disciples from the Roman political leadership to the Jewish religious authorities. The usual explanation for this, the need to avoid harassment from the Romans after the death of Jesus in order to carry on the mission to the Gentiles, she finds rather unconvincing. The full nature of the shift must be clearly understood. It was not merely from Roman to Jewish authority, but from *political* to *religious* authority. The gospel writers, in her view, felt it important to cast the blame for the deaths of Jesus and his disciples not merely upon the Jewish political hierarchy of the day,

but specifically upon the head of the Jewish *religious* tradition and its authority. Thus the shift seems to have arisen not simply from the desire to ensure the success of the campaign for Gentile converts, but from the wish to engage in a polemic toward the Jewish religious tradition itself:

> The idea that the religious authority of 'apostate Israel' has 'always' killed the prophets, and, therefore, culminates its own heritage of apostasy by killing the great messianic prophet, totally governs the entire story line of all the Gospels.[17]

Ruether also takes issue with benign interpretations of Paul on the Jewish question. She is especially critical of those contemporary ecumenists who look positively towards Romans 9-11. They have the right intentions but are guilty of deceptive exegesis. As she sees it, the 'mystery' relationship between Christians and Jews advocated by Paul in no way suggests an ongoing validity for the Jewish covenant as an instrument of salvation in its own right. Paul admits only one authentic covenant of salvation:

> For Paul, there is, and has always been, only one true covenant of salvation. This is the covenant of the promise, given *apart from the Law,* to Abraham and now manifest in those who believe in Abraham's spiritual son, Christ. The people of the Mosaic covenant do not now and never have had any way of salvation through the Torah itself. God never intended to save his people through the Law.[18]

Paul recognized according to Ruether that Jews would refuse to enter this new community of Israel or accept it as the spiritual lineage of the promise given to Abraham for the foreseeable future. But this hardening of Jewish hearts would ultimately change. God did not 'cast off his people' in the sense that he intends to lead them into the church at the end of time. For Ruether, then, the fact that Paul proclaims the 'mystery' of Israel does little to allow a place for the ongoing authenticity of the Mosaic covenant as such or to make room for any spiritual relation to God through Judaism. 'In this sense', she says, 'he enunciates a doctrine of the rejection of the Jews (rejection of Judaism as the proper religious community of God's people) in the most radical form, seeing it as rejected not only now, through the rejection of Christ, but from the beginning'.[19] The ultimate aim of Paul's 'mystery theology' of Judaism is not to grant any permanent validity to Judaism, but only to guarantee the ultimate vindication of Christianity.

Even though she offers strong critiques of the synoptic gospels, Acts and Paul for their anti-Judaic orientation, Ruether reserves her

most stringent attack for the gospel of John. In the fourth gospel the 'unbelief of the Jews' is related to a deep theological mystery. John depicts 'the Jews' as the very incarnation of the false, apostate principle of the fallen world, alienated from its authentic existence in God. They typify the totally carnal person who knows nothing of the spiritual realm. they are totally time-bound in their existence, unable to recognize, like the spiritual brothers and sisters of Jesus, the *kairos* of the Christ Event (John 7.6). Their instinctive reaction to the revelation of the spiritual Son of God is to murder him, for they are aware that his coming has unmasked their false way of living: 'In this murderousness they manifest their true principle of existence. They show that they are "not of God, but of the Devil", who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning . . . '[20]

Ruether clearly divorces herself from those 'apologists' in Christian circles who claim that the division John forges between the 'sons of light' and 'the sons of darkness' is mere allegory which the fourth gospel never meant to apply in a literal way to Christians and Jews. Her contention is that John turned a realistic inner spiritual conflict within humankind – the person in God versus the person alienated from God – into a division between two differing faith postures, i.e. Christianity and Judaism. In so doing John gave the ultimate theological form to the diabolizing of 'the Jews' which served as the primary source of all future forms of anti-Semitism in Christian history. Hence the roots of the church's anti-Semitic tradition stretch back into the New Testament itself, to the Christology of John in particular. The Christian community, understanding the Scriptures Christologically, alone shares in the life of the Father. The Jewish community, which interprets the Scriptures as a testimony to an ongoing covenant with Abraham and Moses, are 'the children of the Devil' who have never known Christ or his Father. The remedy for anti-Semitism is crystal-clear for Ruether: 'There is no way to rid Christianity of its anti-Judaism, which constantly takes social expression in anti-Semitism, without grappling finally with its Christological hermeneutic itself '.[21]

As might be expected, Ruether's radical critique of the New Testament as the source of anti-Semitism has drawn several responses from Christian scholars. In the first place, she has persuaded Gregory Baum to draw away from the arguments he made in his volume discussed earlier. In an introductory essay in *Faith and Fratricide* he states unequivocally that Ruether's book has convinced him he must now change his mind on the subject of New

Testament anti-Semitism. He is now convinced through Ruether's analysis that Paul, for example, never had any intention whatsoever of acknowledging the Jewish religion as a way of grace. In the Pauline perspective Israel had gone blind. It now represented death and spiritual slavery. Yet God did not totally abandon the Jews. Their election remained, not as a source of grace in the present time, but as a divine promise of the eventual conversion of the Jews at the conclusion of human history and their absorption into Christianity, the one true Israel. Baum now writes:

> All attempts of Christian theologians to derive a most positive conclusion from Paul's teaching in Romans 9-11 (and I have done this as much as others) are grounded in wishful thinking. What Paul and the entire Christian tradition taught is unmistakably negative: the religion of Israel is now superseded, the Torah abrogated, the promises fulfilled in the Christian church, the Jews struck with blindness, and whatever remains of the election to Israel rests as a burden upon them in the present age.[22]

Baum insists that if the church is really serious about ridding itself of the anti-Jewish bias built into its teaching, a few marginal changes will not do. Rather a thorough cleansing of the tradition is required. And that will inevitably involve an examination and reinterpretation of the Christ Event itself. Nothing else will do.

While not writing directly in response to Ruether, the Christian scholar from Israel Joseph Stiassny confirms at least some of her points regarding the fourth gospel. He distinguishes sharply between comments against the Jews in the synoptic gospels and in John. The former he views as essentially 'in-house' comments, common to both the Jewish prophetic tradition and to the warring parties within Second Temple Judaism. But by the time John comes on the scene, the situation has profoundly changed. At the time of the final editing of the fourth gospel, the church and the synagogue had become radically separate entities. Christianity's rupture from Judaism had been finalized. Unlike Paul and the synoptic writers, John's attitude toward the Jews is not missionary but apologetic and polemical. It is intended to counter Jewish propaganda and undergird Christian claims. In Stiassny's eyes John employs the expression 'the Jews' to indicate that the Jewish people of his day are the spiritual descendants of the Jewish authorities who showed hostility to Jesus durig his ministry. The refusal of the Jews to believe becomes for John the symbol of all men and women everywhere who fail to accept the gospel message.[23]

Raymond Brown has also modified his position on the absence of anti-Semitism in John which he articulated in his Anchor Bible commentary. His change of viewpoint is not nearly as dramatic as that of Gregory Baum. But there appears to be a significant switch in his thought in several more recent pieces, particularly a contribution to *Worship*[24] magazine in 1975 and comments in his volume *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*.

In the former article where his comments on anti-Semitism in John are somewhat parenthetical and hence not fully developed Brown now indicates his conviction that by deliberately using the term 'the Jews' where other gospel writers refer to the Jewish authorities or various Second Temple Jewish parties John means to extend to the synagogue of his own day the blame that an earlier tradition had pinned on the authorities. While John was not the first to engage in such extension, he is the most insistent New Testament author in this regard. Brown explains this process in John as owing to the persecution Christians were experiencing in his time from the synagogue authorities. Jews who professed Jesus to be the Messiah had now been officially expelled from Judaism, thus making them vulnerable to Roman investigation and punishment. Jews were tolerated by Rome; but who were these Christians whom the Jews disclaimed?

Brown goes on to say that this teaching of John about the Jews which resulted from historical conflict between church and synagogue in his day can no longer be taught as authentic doctrine by contemporary Christianity. Christians today must come to see that such teachings, while a realistic part of the biblical heritage, are no longer valid belief. In *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* this point is made with even greater firmness: 'It would be incredible for a twentieth-century Christian to share or justify the Johannine contention that "the Jews" are the children of the Devil, an affirmation which is placed on the lips of Jesus (8.44)'.[25] He definitely feels a more radical solution is needed for the anti-Judaic material in the fourth gospel than merely softening the translation to 'Judeans' or 'Judaists', or offering the explanation that John often uses the term 'the Jews' when the context implies that the chief priests alone were the culprits. Though Brown would shy away from the radical theological surgery suggested by Ruether as a corrective for the New Testament view of Jews and Judaism, he does advocate the need for significant change. The problem is that he stops short of presenting

any overall approach to the issue. He likewise fails to deal adequately with the radical implications of his argument that significant parts of the Johannine theology of Judaism are no longer valid teaching for today's church.

Negative reactions to *Faith and Fratricide* have come from several Christians long associated with the Jewish-Christian dialogue. John Oesterreicher of the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University has taken strong exception to Ruether's thesis. In an Institute paper entitled *The Anatomy of Contempt* he rejects her basic contentions about the anti-Semitic roots in the epistles and gospels and seemingly accuses her of undermining authentic Christian faith through this claim. He cites the Jewish scholar Leo Baeck's much more sympathetic treatment of Paul on the Jewish question. He criticizes her generally for a failure to understand the rabbinic style of interpretation which Oesterreicher feels had a great impact on the mode of Pauline argumentation. With regard to her charge against the fourth gospel he claims that no competent New Testament scholar in the present day 'thinks that "the Jews" in St John's gospel are the empirical Jews, the historical Jewish community, the people in the villages and towns of the land of Abraham and his descendants. All sound interpreters agree that in the instances that seem to degrade Jews, "the Jews" is a theological cipher or symbol for a world that denies itself to Jesus'.[26]

Several other critics of Ruether's thesis are much more sympathetic than Oesterreicher to the basic goals of *Faith and Fratricide*. This is certainly true of the contributors to the critical volume on *Faith and Fratricide* edited by Alan Davies.[27] It is also true of an article co-authored by Thomas A. Indinopulos and Roy Brown Ward. They do not quarrel with Ruether's proposition that the foundations for anti-Judaic thought were planted in the New Testament. Certainly, they argue, Matthew's gospel represents a genuine hardening of attitudes toward Jews articulated in such themes as the rejection of the 'sons of the kingdom' (i.e., the Jews) whom God will cast into the outer darkness. Likewise they are willing to grant that in the fourth gospel John moves the 'crime of the Jews' very close to what eventually takes shape as the deicide charge. But the appearance of certain forms of anti-Judaic thought in portions of the New Testament does not automatically justify the Ruetherian contention that anti-Judaism is of necessity the left hand of Christology.

Indinopulos and Ward are especially troubled by the position taken by Ruether with respect to Pauline theology. It is difficult for them to comprehend how she can arrive at the conclusion that in Paul Judaism is not an ongoing covenant of salvation in which authentic worship makes possible a genuine relationship with God. As they see Paul, he only characterizes Gentiles, not Jews, as those who 'knew not God'. In fact, Paul himself boasts of his Jewishness. He never argues that Judaism represents false worship of God, but only that a new righteousness has been revealed (Romans 1.17; 3.21; 10.3) which has brought about a new phase in the history of salvation. His adherence to this new revelation does not lead him to deny the holiness of the law (Romans 7.12) nor the election of the Jews (Romans 11.28). These authors find it difficult to understand how Paul can be considered any more anti-Judaic than other Jewish sectarian groups of the period such as Qumran who joined Paul in believing that something new was taking place in history under divine guidance. Unlike the Qumran sectarians who anticipated the destruction of mainstream Judaism (which they considered in a state of apostasy), Paul expressed hope for the ultimate salvation of all Israel (Romans 11.26).[28]

An increasingly common approach to the problem of anti-Judaism in John revolves in distinguishing several textual layers in the gospel. J. Louis Martyn has been a principal exponent of this viewpoint in his writings.[29] It has also been put forth as a missing dimension in Ruether's analysis (and hence a weakness in her position) by the New Testament scholar John Townsend in his contribution to the Davies volume mentioned earlier.

A closer look at the fourth gospel, especially its handling of the trial of Jesus, will result in a much more nuanced understanding of John's claimed anti-Semitism according to Townsend. In some respects he sees John as less anti-Jewish than the synoptics, a point Ruether fails to recognize. John, for example, plays down the religious charge of blasphemy found in the other gospels. For him the antagonism of the Jewish establishment against Jesus was primarily rooted in a fear that his preaching would disrupt political relations with the Romans. According to Townsend John stresses the Roman involvement in the arrest of Jesus and makes no mention of any deal between Judas and the Temple leadership. On this point he concludes that

> According to John, Jewish authorities were responsible for arresting Jesus, but these authorities had acted under Roman pressure and had carried out the action with a band of Roman soldiers. Of the four evangelists, John alone was unwilling to shift responsibility for the arrest from Roman to Jew, even though failure to do so implied that Rome considered Jesus dangerous and invited Roman persecution of his followers.[30]

Townsend goes on to add that the Johannine trial narrative de-emphasizes the Jewish proceedings in connection with the trial and sentencing of Jesus. While the other evangelists describe the primary charge against Jesus as strictly a crime against Jewish law, John focused on the political aspects

> by making the Jewish proceedings quite informal with no mention of the accusations against Jesus. The evangelist has featured the importance of the Roman trial in which the charge was a political crime against Rome.[31]

Townsend's interpretation, were it to achieve scholarly consensus, would make our task of Jewish-Christian reconciliation easier. But problems would still persist. For even Townsend does not deny the clear anti-Judaism present in John, including the passion narratives. He is merely arguing that such anti-Judaism is not the full story. John, in short, contains an uneasy mixture of anti-Jewish and pro-Jewish materials that hang together in considerable tension. Townsend would be the first to admit that the anti-Jewish, not the pro-Jewish, dimensions tend to be highlighted in Christian celebration and preaching.

A final approach to the question of New Testament anti-Semitism is represented by the writings of Malcolm Lowe. In an indirect response to a Ruetherian-type analysis he argues that the problem, at least with respect to the use of the term 'the Jews', is largely a question of mistranslation, not of endemic anti-Semitism. While acknowledging that the term *hoi Ioudaioi* on a few occasions refers to 'Jews in general' its basic usage is geographical. It refers to 'the Judeans' (on occasion even more restrictedly to the Judean authorities) in contradistinction to the Galileans. He believes this is especially true of John where the term is so prominent. If we wish to solve the problem of the New Testament as the basis for later (and continuing) anti-Judaic outlooks in Christianity we must consciously attend to retranslation of this term:

> . . . rendering *hoi Ioudaioi* as 'the Jews' is not only incorrect . . . but also pernicious. As long as the mistranslation continues, generations will

> continue to read that 'the Jews' had Jesus killed and . . . to infer that they declared themselves and their descendants responsible. Thus this philological error of the Palestinian use of *Ioudaios* to distinguish Judeans from Galileans, etc., with its wider meanings in the diaspora has provided, in practically all modern translations of the gospels, a constant excuse for anti-Semitism whose further existence cannot be permitted.[32]

This position advocated by Lowe has been rejected by a number of other scholars including Raymond Brown.

(1) We have now seen several divergent approaches to the problem of New Testament anti-Semitism. All come from scholars highly conscious of the history of Jewish persecution by Christians and keenly intent on terminating this history once and for all. Their lack of agreement, however, is evidence that the issue will remain a hotly contested one for some time to come. No total resolution lies in sight. Nonetheless some tentative conclusions are possible. It is clear that read with some sophistication the gospels present a case for basic Roman responsibility for the death of Jesus. On this point, Ruether's contention about the deliberate shifting of blame to Jewish religious authorities is not that strong. There was some attempt to whitewash Roman guilt, at least in the synoptics. But there is no clear evidence, contrary to Ruether, that the primary motivation here was theological rather than political. Here sufficient background information should provide the Christian believer with a fairly accurate understanding of the situation. The problem remains, however, with how this background information is to be made available. So many Christians read the gospels without such information. How are they to come to know what scholars like Brown and Vawter insist upon, namely, that an accurate understanding of the New Testament cannot be gained from the pure text. The grasp of the constructive dimensions of Second Temple Judaism remains minimal in the churches. Jesus is still largely perceived as a 'loner' in his gospel challenge. Until Jesus is consciously reintegrated into the Jewish community of his day in a positive way the crucifixion narratives will remain a rich source for popular anti-Semitic attitudes in our day.

(2) Ruether over-exaggerates Pauline anti-Judaism. He shows a greater love and respect for the continuing validity of Jewish religion that she is willing to grant. Nonetheless, I think she and Gregory Baum are correct when they criticize the uncritical overuse of Romans 9-11. This section of the epistle ends on a conversionalist

note that I personally find unacceptable in light of what we have come to know about Judaism and in virtue of the Jewish experience of the Nazi holocaust. Stendahl is too optimistic in his interpretation of Paul's intentions with regard to Judaism despite his positive contribution to the dialogue on the question. What we can say is that Romans 9-11 undercuts any attempt to totally invalidate the meaningfulness and beauty of the Jewish covenant. But we cannot stop here. We need to see Romans 9-11 as a challenge for further theological development, not as an end point. Unless a Christian is willing to admit the principle of continuing development of the religious tradition which can go beyond mere biblical formulations I do not believe the problem of the anti-Semitic potential of the New Testament can ultimately be resolved. We must be prepared to build a new model of the Jewish-Christian relationship which allows meaningful theological space for Judaism, and which serves as the basis for discarding the kind of teachings that Raymond Brown has argued are no longer tenable as Christian faith proclamation. Otherwise we face the prospect of continuing anti-Semitism within the churches.[33]

(3) There appears to be a growing consensus within the sphere of recent Johannine studies that at least some parts of the fourth gospel do indeed intend to condemn the specific Jewish community of its day. This development contradicts the assertions of people like John Oesterreicher. Coupled with this growing admission of deliberate denigration of Judaism is the increased realization that the basic substrate of John to which the anti-Judaic sections were appended at a rather late date in the composition process reveals strongly pro-Judaic tendencies. While this latter discovery complicates the discussion of anti-Semitism and hence calls for a modification of Ruether's thesis, it does not remove the fact that significant parts of John come very close to what we mean by modern anti-Semitism class hostility towards the Jewish people because of a sinister identification between them and the 'demonic' forces of darkness. The attempts by some Christian commentators to gloss over this reality by arguing that 'Jews are merely the symbol of evil everywhere' for John falls down on both scholarly and moral grounds. The only solution to this situation is the one suggested by Raymond Brown: We can no longer consider these sections authentic Christian teaching today. Getting this approach accepted in large parts of the Christian world, however, remains a very formidable task.

The issue of the anti-Semitism of John is far from a settled question. It poses problems that the more internal Jewish battles found in the synoptics do not. I am convinced it is possible to present Johannine Christology without of necessity denigrating Judaism. In fact I believe that the Johannine 'Word made flesh' Christology has the best possibility (along with the later Pauline Christology) for creating ongoing theological space for Judaism because it is not so directly tied to the 'fulfilment of Messianic prophecies' model that so dominates the synoptics. But this will still take considerable study and reflection on the part of Christian scholars. The question before us on a pastoral level is how do we introduce the subtle distinctions regarding the John/Jewish question that scholars like John Townsend are beginning to make, especially in the presentation of the passion narratives? We in the churches need to face this situation squarely. Townsend himself has offered one possible outlet. In association with the Israel Study Group of Christian Scholars he has published an interpretative text of the passion for liturgical use during Holy Week.[34] Another might be to return to the old Catholic practice of insisting on footnotes in biblical translations.

(4) The denunciation of the Pharisees, so common to the synoptic gospels, is an issue on which Ruether's research is very vulnerable. This is surprising because she has shown on occasion, including in *Faith and Fratricide,* some acquaintance with current investigations on Pharisaism. But she never really relates this research to the problem of New Testament anti-Semitism.

A considerable amount of the hostility toward the Pharisees in the New Testament may in fact be explained by inter-Pharisaic contestation. Ruether gives too little due to this possibility.

(5) The attacks against the so-called 'Judaizers' can be disposed of rather easily on scholarly grounds. This does not, however, solve the pastoral problem. These people were simply not representative of the Jewish mainstream. Many Jews of the time would have objected to their rigidity in Torah interpretation as strongly as did Paul. It is also likely that they were not even Jewish by birth. Yet when these passages are read without explanation the average Christian may take them as condemnations of Judaism as a whole. Here again we run into the problem of background material that remains unsolved on the popular level.

(6) Attention needs to be given to the letter to the Hebrews whose anti-Judaic language, especially in chapters 7-10 where a definite 'superiority' ethos is present relative to church/synagogue, has been little explored thus far. While certainly not as influential as Pauline and gospel thought in the formation of Christian consciousness Hebrews carries a destructive potential that should not be ignored in any overall attempt to eradicate New Testament-based anti-Semitic attitudes within the church.[35]

In conclusion I would like to raise one final point. Throughout this essay the terms 'anti-Semitic' and 'anti-Judaic' have been used as virtual synonyms. A debate has ensued as to whether such usage is too loose and further intensifies the problem at hand. Edward Flannery raised this issue in an essay in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* in 1973.[36] While recognizing that no overly tight distinction can be drawn between New Testament hostility to Jews and Judaism and subsequent anti-Semitic attitudes in the society as a whole, it is useful to discuss the distinction at least in scholarly circles. Samuel Sandmel also endorsed the distinction, at least to the point of considering the term 'anti-Semitic' inappropriate as a label for the New Testament because of its modern origins.[37]

I would agree that we need to continue discussion of the distinction in scholarly circles at least, whatever the slim possibilities of introducing the distinction in popular language. With the very possible exception of sections of John New Testament hostility towards Jews and Judaism was not characterized by the hatred, even unto death, that has been central to so many modern expressions of anti-Semitism. The New Testament basically was not embryonic Nazism whatever may have happened in later Christian interpretations of the gospels and epistles. This needs to be made clear and the distinction proposed by Flannery helps to do this up to a point. The one area where the distinction might let the church off the hook too easily is the matter of the 'Jews as darkness and evil' passages of the fourth gospel. As Janis Leibig has correctly said, though too globally, 'The Fourth Gospel far exceeds Flannery's definition of "anti-Judaism". It is neither "bereft of hatred or stereotyping of Jews" nor are its polemics "fair and irenic" '.[38] Pursuing the discussion, however, helps to make clear that the question of New Testament anti-Semitism, whether in John or elsewhere, cannot be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Unnuanced accusations against the Christian Scriptures as anti-Semitic are scholarly unsound and prejudicial in reverse.

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SOME COMMENTS ON THE ARTICLES BY ROSEMARY RUETHER AND JOHN PAWLIKOWSKI

PETER M. HAWKINS

'At its root anti-Semitism in Christian civilization springs directly from Christian theological anti-Judaism.' (Rosemary Ruether)

The question must be asked, 'Why was it that Christian Jews and then Christian Gentiles were "Anti-Jew"?' It must never be forgotten that the Christian Mission began within the Synagogue and within Palestinian Judaism. The position of Christian Jews in the ancient World of Rome became extremely dangerous when they were progressively expelled from the Synagogue. It is unlikely that anti-Semitism would have gained any supporters in the Christian Church if it had been permitted to remain within the Synagogue. However, from about AD 50 it became clear to the Roman authorities that Christian Jews were no longer under the protection of the Synagogue, and that they were in company with pagans refusing to sacrifice. The anxiety of the Roman authorities about this threat to the divine support for the Roman World, was fuelled by many Jewish denunciations of the 'followers of Christ'. (*Suet-Vita Claudii,* XXV. 4 Cp Acts 18.2.) Justin Martyr (XCVI: 4-6.) relates how the expulsion of the Christian Jews and Hearers from the Synagogue rendered them open to the charge of atheism, with death as the punishment. An anathema was added to the Blessings at the end of the Synagogue service, making it impossible for a Christian Jew or Hearer to be present.

This antagonism between Christian Jews, Hearers and Jews was also common outside the Roman world. Thus in Persia in 341, the Jews denounced Symeon, Archbishop of Seucia and Ctesiphon as a friend of the Romans (enemies of Persia) and he was executed. (Sozoman HE II 9.1-5 & 10.1-2.)

By this time membership of the Church had ceased to be a reason for persecution, and was favoured by the Imperial authorities. This in turn put the Church in difficulty outside the Empire, amongst the enemies of Rome. Previously the Jews had enjoyed a degree of favour in the Roman World

and were excused from many civic obligations; they did not have to sacrifice to the genius of Caesar and they did not have to hold office. Holding office in the Roman World was an expensive pagan duty, which Jews were fortunate not to have to perform. Christians could not perform it, even if they had wanted to. Roman officials did not become Christian until they had finished their imperial duties (Constantine and St Ambrose of Milan). Thus the statement 'The anti-Judaic laws of the Church and the Christian State laid the basis for the inferiorization of the civic and personal status of the Jews in Christian society that lasted until the emancipation of the Jews in the nineteenth century' is anachronistic because those laws were simply inherited from the 'pagan' imperial privileges given to the Jews, as the Romans took over the Jewish areas of the Greek world. Once the Empire became Christian under Justinian, it meant that Jews and pagans were excluded from the government in exactly the same way that Jews and Christians had been excluded from the pagan government. The ancient world was not one in which all had rights, only the few. Thus the transference from Pagan Rome to the New Christian Rome of Constantinople had consequences for pagans and Jews.

The Roman World was always seen as the most wonderful place for people to live, but also as being something incredibly fragile which might easily fall apart. It was a world with a non-Roman imperial language (Greek) and covered parts of three continents and many peoples. It survived in the face of the endless incursions of envious barbarians. It is not surprising that the Roman Government viewed unco-operative groups as threats, whether they were Christian or Jew.

From the Christian point of view, the Jews who remained as such were
(i) liable to denounce Christian Jews and hearers to the government either Roman, Persian or Islamic, when there was an obvious political advantage in so doing.
(ii) liable to collude with anti-Roman governments outside the Roman World, when it finally became Christian. Various Christian groups also did this.

Thus the Fathers did rail against the Jews and against Christian heretics! It would be helpful to know the reference for St John Chrysostom alleging that 'the Jews are said to have been cannibals and to have sacrificed their children to idols'. It sounds rather like the accusations received by Pliny the Younger about the Christians in Bithynia c. 112. (Plin. Epp. X (ad Traj.), xcvi.)

In the near East at the time of the Crusades the Jews were likely to side against the Crusaders with the Muslims. it must be remembered that the centre of Christendom at the time of the Crusades was Constantinople, and that the Crusade Massacres were more typical of the 'Furor Normannorum' than of the response of the Christian World of Byzantium. The Church did

preach against such behaviour. When the Crusaders captured Jerusalem and Alexandria, they massacred everyone, Jew, Muslim and orthodox Christian.

The Nazism of the twentieth century was not exclusively anti-Semitic, it also persecuted trade unionists, communists etc. The anti-Semitism was based upon the curious pseudo-scientific 'race-theories' of the time as well as *land und volk und lebensraum*. Thus gypsies, the disabled, deviant, the Slavs were all in the way, and to be moved or removed!

'Severe laws were passed forbidding Jews from converting Christians to Judaism'. Justinian ordered such conversion 'rescripts to be null', and that is hardly severe.

'Jews were forbidden from holding any civil or military office and barred from the *cursus honorum* of the state'. The Jews had obtained this exemption from the Romans as the price of their incorporation into the Roman World. It was a privilege to be exempt, and an expensive duty to serve.

Codex Theodosius XVI 9.3 says there are to be no conversions of slaves owned by Jews to Judaism, and *not* 'exclusion from holding slaves eliminated Jews from agriculture and large industry'.

The Roman World did regulate the nature of 'permissable' marriage, between the various classes of people. Thus a Roman citizen could not marry a slave, etc. Codex Theodosius III 7.2 & IX 7.5 does forbid marriage between Jews and Christians and this remained the Common Law of England until the eighteenth century. It was not really an ecclesiastical law in the sense of being a Canon, but like all laws affecting the Church, it was ecclesiastical in its effects.

There is no evidence that the Roman Government in the fourth century officially persecuted the Jews. Until that time it had been persecuting the Christians. Codex Theodosius XVI 10.24 says 'law-abiding Jews and pagans are not to be disturbed'. (8/6/423) Non-Christians were treated more leniently than Christian heretics.

'By AD 380 orthodox Christianity had become the exclusive faith of all citizens of this empire'. It was not until 7th December 415 that pagans were barred from the imperial service. (Codex Theodosius XVI 10.21) In Rome, the old pagan capital, paganism survived into the seventh century. The Pantheon was dedicated to 'St Maria ad Martyres' as a Christian church on 13th May 609.

'Without doubt this accusation played a major role in the acceptance by so many Christians of the Nazi Final Solution of the Jewish Problem'. (Pawlikowski).

The Nazis were so afraid of criticism by the Church, they infiltrated the synodical system of the Evangelische Kirche (Lutheran) which resulted in the Barmen Declaration of 1934, and obtained a Concordat with the Pope. (They also infiltrated the trade unions and the political parties). The purpose of these efforts was to neutralise criticism. The National Socialist Movement was not remarkable in having devout Christians as part of it, but was remarkable in its political ability to subvert or neutralise potential or real opposition from the Church or any other organisation.

'The Solutions to the Jewish Question' were proposed by Constantine Polyedonostov in 1881 to the Tsar. The solutions were that one-third of all Jews were to emigrate; one-third were to convert (to Orthodoxy); and one-third to die of hunger. The National Socialists of Germany added to this the word 'Final'. It is reasonably clear that most Christians in the Hitler Reich did *not* know that the places where the Jews, Gypsies, trade unionists, Communists, deviants and so forth were being sent, were 'Death Camps', and it was not until 1942 that this system of Death Camps became general policy. The Wannsee Conference on 20th January 1942 actually discussed the nature of the Final Solution, but the resolutions of that Conference did not gain full effect until the following year.

The decisions of that Conference were extremely secret, and even now it is not easy to investigate the matter. We can assume that most Christians in the Third Reich did NOT know the nature of the Final Solution. Nazi Germany had had a programme of euthanasia for several years but it too was kept very secret. Its purpose was 'to destroy life and to prevent the physically degenerate and mentally sick from propagating'. (Davidowicz p.171).

The programme for the killing was lodged in the Chancellery. In this programme 5,000 children were killed. The title of the department was 'Reich Committee for Scientific Research into Hereditary and Severe Constitutional Diseases', to camouflage its real purpose from the public. The actual nature of the work of this Committee began to leak out and on 13th August 1941 the Bishop of Limburg wrote to the Minister of Justice to protest. The programme was discontinued as a result.

Thus the 'Final Solution' was a vast extension of the existing Euthanasia Programme, and there is evidence that the same personnel and equipment was used.

'Everywhere the Germans employed lies, surprise and stealth to liquidate the ghettos'. (Davidowicz p. 398). The main death camp of

Auschwitz was chosen because it had easy access by rail; was isolated from populated areas, and enabled easy camouflage and concealment of the installations. Himmler addressing the SS on 4th October 1943 said that the annihilation of the Jews was not to be spoken about. 'Each of 80 million Germans would have his decent Jew', so the people must not know. Even the reports of escaped eye witnesses were disbelieved by those who would soon be going to the death camps. But such a terrible programme did not remain secret and on 25th January 1942 the Jewish newspaper *Veher* stated that 'the rumours are that the deportees are being killed'. Then on 1st February 1942 'killed with gas'. By August 1942 the villagers of Treblinka knew that terrible things took place in the camp, but little more.

In the period of the 1930s solutions to the serious problems of Europe were very necessary. The National Socialists did produce solutions which beguiled people into thinking that their purpose was benign. As the continent of Europe came under the rule of the Reich, people began to realise that evil was abroad. At the beginning, countries such as Austria and Italy were not critical of the pogrom against the Jews. In France however, the people were divided and so was the Church. In The Netherlands the Calvinist Church was aloof. In Denmark the major Jewish population was smuggled out of the country to Sweden, and the remaining 400 were kept alive by the continuous Danish and Red Cross interventions on their behalf. In Bulgaria the Orthodox Church spoke up for the Jews, whilst in Greece the Orthodox Church was silent. It depended very much upon the national politics of the country concerned, whether the Church spoke up for the Jews or not.

The basis of the 'Final Solution' was:

(1) Anti-Semitism
(2) Racial Aryan Pride
(3) Pseudo scientific theories of race purity
(4) Bolshevik-Jewish conspiracy
(5) Volkism
(6) Economic problems.

There is no 'anti-Communism' in the New Testament, but that did not save the Communists. Not a word occurs in the Gospel about Gypsies, but they (two million) perished.

Many words in the Gospels occur in favour of the sick and disabled, but they were killed. Murder has always been prohibited to Jews and Christians, but the Nazis considered they were outside such laws, and thus were outside the Jewish and Christian Covenants.

(The references are to Lucy Davidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-45* (Penguin 1975).)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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